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RESEARCH ARTICLE

NAVIGATING THE LIMITS OF CAPITALISM TO RESIST URBAN MARGINALITY: The Case of the Casa Madiba Network

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ABSTRACT: This empirical paper addresses a key problem for activists: how to resist capitalism while simultaneously responding to the immediate needs of the most marginalized segments of the population. Through the analysis of the case of Casa Madiba, a social center in Rimini (Italy), the paper discusses the role of squatting and the temporary use of space in the formation of the urban commons. It presents community-led urban development projects and bottom-up forms of welfare as potential tools to create a vision of the world that systematically opposes neoliberalism. It also considers some potential risks squatters face. Squatting has often been used as a placeholder by real estate investors or by the municipality, and even has the potential to be co-opted into master planning. The paper shows how squatters located in smaller towns can strategically adapt to the local social geography by creating strategic alliances which incorporate the tradition of partisan mutual help and social welfare in their day-to-day practice.

KEYWORDS: autonomy, commons, self-management, squatting, temporary use of space

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1. Introduction

Since the outbreak of the 2008 financial crisis, social movements in Southern Europe have had to develop a new set of resistance practices to cope with increasing precarity and the decline of welfare support. As squatting has become a tool to produce urban commons, its success started to depend on institutional stabilization and the opportunity to access resources fundamental to the community livelihood. This paper

discusses the role of squatting in establishing urban commons through the case of Casa Madiba, a social center located in Rimini, an Adriatic coastal city in Northern Italy. The case of the Casa Madiba Network is a success story of squatters who have navigated along the limits of bureaucratic rules to secure a space where bottom-up welfare is envisioned and implemented through self-management. In this case, squatting was not only a resource for the local homeless in Rimini but also a means to implement a system of social and urban planning that presents an alternative to neoliberalism, promotes the empowerment of the disadvantaged and is based on the practice of common solidarity and self-management. Theoretically, the paper considers the risks and benefits of temporal space use for squatters by empirically analyzing its practicability for squatters' pursuing urban commons.

This paper fills a gap in the literature on Italian social centers, which has been primarily interested in major metropolitan centers and has rarely studied the enactment of radical politics in smaller provincial areas of Italy (with few exceptions, see Aru 2018; Filhol 2018; Piazza 2016). Nevertheless, the interurban areas are fundamental pools of production and economic growth in the context of geographical conurbation and the formation of multipolar urban spaces, also characteristic of the region of Emilia Romagna where Casa Madiba is located (Romano and Zullo 2014).

This article is structured as follows. In section 2 I explain my positionality as an ethnographer in the field and discuss my methodology. Section 3 is dedicated to the theoretical contextualization of the case study. I begin with a brief history of Italian social centers showing their progressive transformation from places dedicated to counterculture to places designed for social care (section 3.1). I use the concept of the urban commons to connect the urban planner pursed of a "just city" to the activists understanding of "right to the city" and consider the function of temporal use of space in rethinking the urban (section 3.2). I conclude the theoretical section by explaining how support to those suffering from "advanced marginality" and "partial citizenship" fits into a bigger narrative of resistance to neoliberalism, which has been taken on by social centers (section 3.3). Section 4 is dedicated to the analysis of the case of the Casa Madiba Network. I begin by contextualizing it within the local and regional context, and I explain the difficulties generated by squatting repression in the region which motivated Casa Madiba's institutionalization (section 4.1). I then show how the stability of having a legalized space was used for the establishment of urban commons and to secure a permanent position on the territory (section 4.2). Lastly, I look at how the practice of "communing" is understood and practiced by the Casa Madiba Network, considering the specificity of squatting and its role in the context of higher stigmatization of the poor (section 4.3). The concluding section (section 5) summarizes the paper's findings: squatters located in smaller towns have developed a set of practices that are tailored to their community's specificity. They enhance a system of mutualism driven by principles of human solidarity which challenge neoliberalism to its core, while also pursuing social empowerment.

2. Positionality and Methodology

I came to Casa Madiba in 2017-18 as a graduate student researching my master's thesis. I do not consider myself an outsider to urban social movements, but my engagement with social centers in Italy has been limited by the precariousness of being an emerging social researcher subject to high mobility. I believe academic research can make a political contribution when it addresses issues of concern for activists and is supported by a reflexive methodology. Like Coleman (2015), I find the "relationship between committed engagement and intellectual critique as permanently, but productively, irresolvable—requiring a persistent back-and-forth movement between committed engagement and an ethos of critique" (277). I am informed of

the contradictions of a reflexive engagement in critical ethnography (Chari and Donner, 2010) and of the fallacy of the arbitrary use of notion of "researcher", "researched" and the "field" (Hyndman, 2001).

Prior to the beginning of my field research, I agreed with the leading activists in the Casa Madiba Network on investing most of my time in Casa Gallo, the homeless shelter project launched by the activists. At the time, Casa Gallo's future was uncertain and much of the activists' efforts were spent on developing projects that would bring it stability. My research was seen as a step in the social center's ongoing participatory urban planning project named Madi Marecchia. Far from wanting to patronize activists with academic language and theory, with this study I wanted to contribute to the political agenda of the Casa Madiba Network specifically, and the social center movements broadly. My research provided an attentive and impartial – yet sympathetic – ethnographer gaze that observed how ideological premises are met in the everyday life of the social center. Being an outsider and not directly involved in the social center activities allowed me to decrypt unspoken norms of the social center and learn its operational system.

Most of the ethnographic research was conducted in January/February 2018. During that period, I visited Casa Madiba and Casa Gallo daily and followed the social center's day to day activities. I participated to Casa Gallo's weekly internal assembly, its common lunch and the Casa Madiba Network general assembly. I observed Italian classes, the high school students' meeting, the reggae crew practice, Casa Madiba's weekly market, and various social events. Also valuable was the informal time spent with the residents of Casa Gallo when formal activities were not held. I dedicated much of my time in the company of different groups living in Casa Gallo, trying to escape gender or national divisions. I never formally took charge of any activities, but I helped in basic tasks when the possibility appeared. After leaving the field, I kept in contact with the activists, having follow-up phone calls, occasional but regular visits, and took part in occasional demonstrations and events.

I gained my primary knowledge from two long-term activists in the group, who have been involved with the collective since its beginning. I carried out four semi-formal in-depth interviews. The remaining material was collected through informal conversations with activists and homeless people in the center, with volunteers and social workers and via participant observation. In support of my research I used a socio-semiotic approach (Fiske, 1990) to examine the promotional materials (flyers, pamphlets, social media posts, visual material) produced by the social center. This analysis helped me to identify the signifiers used by this collective of activists and to cross reference data collected ethnographically. Using content analysis, I also examined the online local press coverage featuring Casa Madiba in the period from 2012 to 2018 to understand the socio-political context in which the activists operated and the activists' depiction in the mainstream media. In this paper I engage with a limited part of the research and leave aside an in-depth analysis of decision-making, self-management, and autonomy, to focus on the role of the social center in the development of the urban commons.

3. The Quest for a Just City

3.1 Squatting for the formation of resource-driven social centers

Since the economic recession of the 2000s, the governments' tendency to implement austerity measures have led to a new wave of social mobilization all over Europe. People have denounced politicians' responsibilities for the economic crisis (Klandermans and van Stekelenburg 2016). In Italy, between 2008 and 2011, collectives of researchers, precarious workers, high school and university students took to the streets shouting the slogan "we won't pay for your crisis" and protesting public service privatization and

market-driven policies (Zamponi 2012). In this context, a new type of squatting has evolved. The anti-austerity movement found in squatting a solution to their livelihood problems and opposed the privatization of public services by creating "commons" for the city (Lopez and Sarram 2016; Mudu and Rossini 2018). The recent practice of using squatting for the creation of livelihood resources has reshaped the features of the traditional Italian squats, social centers. Far from being static entities, social centers have always evolved and adapted to local and international challenges. The weakness of the welfare system together with increasing marginality, have pushed social centers to move beyond cultural and political agendas in the pursuit of resources essential for community livelihood.

In this paper I focus on what Hans Prujit (2013) called the "entrepreneurial squat", known in the Italian context as the "social center". I follow Mudu and Chattopadhyay's (2016) description of social centers as spaces "originated in the squatting of an abandoned place, where people experiment with non-institutional action and association through self-management. They can be ascribed to the long-term fractured tradition of communism and anarchism, obviously filtered by the new radical trends, for example feminism or autonomism" (15). Italian social centers are historically rooted in the antagonist social movement of the '70s (Balestrini et al., 2015; Dazieri, 1996) when they were established to create space for counter-culture and autonomist politics. While the repertoires of action and the social configuration of squatted social centers differ across the country, the action of squatting as a determinant moment of its formation was their common feature. Other important defining characteristics of a social center are self-management as both a system which determines the decision-making practice and its financial structure, and self-financing which often enhances local fair-trade economies (Mudu, 2004). The strong ties between social centers and antagonist and alter-globalization movements has been well articulated in the literature (Membretti and Mudu, 2013; Montagna, 2006; Mudu, 2004). The multicolored geography of social centers in Italy pushed them to join different political movements and to follow various political agendas within the spectrum of left politics.

In Northern-Eastern Italy, one strong trend of social centers has been influenced by the politics of the Disobbedienti (Dissenters). This group was formed during the Genoa G8 summit in 2001 with the name Tute Bianche (White Overalls). At the time, groups such as the Partito di Rifondazione Comunista (The Communist Refoundation Party), the COBAS independent workers union, and the Tute Bianche were motivated by the desire to establish a dialogue among the various political organizations in Italy (Montagna, 2006). Pivotal to the Disobbedienti was the creation of a different "reality" in which social security for the marginalized became the primary political tool for social change. For the Disobbedienti, illegal actions were justified by the impossibility of accepting inequality and were used as a strategy that aimed to push legal norms into a more progressive direction which overcome the status quo. After the Genoa mobilization, many groups formed around the issue of anti-globalization converged into local mobilization and squatting, triggering an evolution of social centers (Mudu & Rossini, 2018). No longer invisible "liberated" spaces, social centers became visible ones where a welfare community could be created (Montagna 2007).

Social centers have become instrumental in the providing of a series of services by combining formal and informal structures. They propose a model of organization developed along the lines of urban social movements that involve practices of self-management and non-hierarchical organization, to develop common strategies of resistance to the growing social and economic instability faced. Informality is not necessarily preferred by the activists, but it allows for structural change within the system. As Susser and Tonnelat (2013) have suggested, the urban social movement organized collective actions to reclaim the commons in the so-called "regime of property management" (107). For communities, the commons manifest a principle of belongingness that is "neither private nor public", but which is "located within the bounds of a given community, it manifests the belonging of its members through a sharing principle" (107).

3.2 Squatting for the right to the city and the urban commons

The vision triggered by social centers is rooted in the critical urban theory that has reflected on the possibility of the creation of a vision of urban life that points beyond capitalism as the "structuring principle of political-economic and spatial organization" (Brenner, Marcuse and Mayer 2012, 14). Urban scholars argue that cities should not only be seen as "sites for strategies of capital accumulation" (ibid) but also as "arenas in which the conflicts and contradictions associated with historically and geographically specific accumulation strategies are expressed and fought out." This perspective sees capitalist cities' essential role in the mobilization for "alternatives to capitalism itself, its associated process of profit-driven urbanization, and its relentless commodification and re-commodification of urban spaces" (ibid).

The concepts of the "right to the city" (Bodnar 2013; Harvey 2012; Lefebvre 1996; Purcell 2002) and of the "commons" (Ostrom 2015) are central to social centers. The term "commons" derives from "common land" and refers to a system in which natural resources such as agricultural fields, grazing lands and forests used to be accessible to the community. Their privatization and their transformation into "enclosures" represented an appropriation of the commons by capitalist forces (Foster and Iaione 2016) which closed off people's possibilities to come together in space (Stavrides 2016). There is no univocal definition of commons. This term often appears as a slightly idealized notion of not-yet-privatized resources or spaces that used to be in place before capitalism, and over which communities want to regain control. When using the notion of "commons", I suggest thinking of it as a system in which communities manage resources without the intervention of either the market or the state. In the social centers' context, I find it more pertinent to use the term "communing", which does not simply indicate the idea of a shared space, but rather refers to "a set of practices and inventive imaginaries which explore the emancipating potentialities of sharing" (Stavrides 2016, 7). The term communing suggests the relational set of practices that are adapted to the characteristics of the place people use every day (Bresnihan and Byrne 2014). Communing focuses on the process rather than on an ultimate goal and involves a quest for a shared life. As a strategy of resistance against urban enclosures, squatting is often considered one of the "ultimately alternative forms of sociality that protect us against enclosure and market forces, enabling us to survive independently or with degrees of independence from wage labor" (Hodkinson 2012, 516). The "claim to the commons" has many points of contact with the concept of the "right to the city" developed by Henri Lefebvre (1996) and made famous by David Harvey (2012). The "right to the city" is the collective right to exercise power on the city and to reshape the process of urbanization. It also indicates a "radical urban imagination that goes beyond the urban, an imagination that strives for the impossible to achieve the possible" (Bodnar 2013, 87). Both notions of "right to the city" and the "urban commons" involve a reconsideration of the notions of public and private space. While for squatting the notions of "right to the city" has often represented a claim on the space(s) abused by capitalist forces, the "urban commons" appears less of an antagonist concept which indicates a system of alternative resources for the general community.

As the repression of squatting has become more systematized (Dadusc and Dee 2015), temporary use of space have spread in urban development, often favoring the incorporation of less radical urban projects into master planning. This system appeared in moments of weak urban planning when areas were vacant due to either to the weak property market, to the lack of a financial mean for redevelopment or because neglected by developers. Ali Madanipour (2017) explains that temporary use of space is "embedded in the material processes of urban development, as these processes have been adjusted to neoliberal globalization, economic restructuring and recurring crises" (2). According to Madanipour, the cyclical crisis of overproduction has become more frequent due to globalization and has increased also vacant spaces and made necessary a flexible method of spatial production. Madanipour affirms that:

> The crisis went far beyond the periodic economic cycles, as the global reach of capitalism exposed localities to frequent global crises of much higher magnitudes. In deep economic crisis and a combination of overproduction, inequality, and maldistribution, the demand for, and the exchange value of, fixed goods, such as space had severely contracted, which demanded flexibility not only in price and functions but also in time (7).

Projects based on squatting have suffered from the risks of being commodified through this model of urban development and of losing their capacity of building resistance to neoliberalism and pursue the "right to the city". Always under the threat of eviction, squatters are often called to establish a dialogue with whoever has the power to evict them. Social centers' process of institutionalization is one of the most discussed issues in the contemporary debates surrounding squatting (for an account on this debate see Azozomox, Martínez and Gil 2014; Dee 2017; Pruijt 2003; Uitermark 2004). The repression or the integration of squats within the system depends on various factors: for example, the type of ownership of the property, the activities implemented there, or the actors involved. The interaction with local stakeholders is delicate. It can represent opportunities for squats preservation or improvement, but it can compromise a squat by co-opting it into permanent urban planning and exploiting it into the city branding. As illustrated in the literature (Martínez 2014) the more favorable condition acquired through the negotiation with authorities allows the activists to ensure a safe space that supports ongoing oppositional struggles and develops welfare services in favor of people marginalized or excluded from official support systems. This is what Hodkinson and Chatterton (2006) called a "tactical compromise". It is supported by a "set of power relations" (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006) through which squatters negotiate their desire for autonomy with the pragmatic reality constituted by the authorities' representatives, local organizations and a hostile social landscape. By establishing an organization based on principles of self-management and non-hierarchy, these "liberated spaces" become safer zones where activists gain strengths for future struggles and try to rebalance the crisis of social reproduction and the "crisis of care" (Fraser 2016) that is rooted in the structural dynamics of financialized capitalism.

The temporary use of space agreement is an example of a tactical compromise. Squatting for social centers is in in itself a - non-alienated - temporary use of vacant space which enables a "cognitive liberation (Nepstad 1997, 471) and a rejection of capitalist system where "social centers constitute a new claim to the city - a demand that land and property can be used to meet social needs, not to service global, or extra-local, capital" (Hodkinson and Chatterton 2006, 310). The system of temporary planning offers an opportunity for public authorities to maintain credibility, and for the activists to access low-cost or free spaces. While the short-term user operates under the eyes of temporality and precariousness, the long-term owners use the system of temporary use model to reduce their risks of having a property vacant, while waiting for a secure market. As Lauren Andres (2012) explains, because the power relations of those involved are unclear, temporary users are given the power to shape the space without the need to conform to strict regulations – or any, in the case of squatting – and without following standardized bureaucratic and financial procedures. Local authorities and market operations are in a standby position, waiting for more favorable moments in which to intervene by starting a negotiation with the temporary occupants or by directly evicting them. Moreover, as suggested also by Andres, during this "meanwhile", temporary occupants can acquire a position that would later help them to sustain this place, yet they might also contribute unwillingly to the property value increase and to the gentrification of a given area. They are both a form of protest and a call for better living conditions, as well as a "self-help" strategy and a practical solution to deprivation because they contribute in the production of resources for those involved with it. The interaction with local

stakeholders is delicate. It can represent opportunities for squats preservation or improvement, but it can compromise a squat by co-opting it into permanent This is what Hodkinson and Chatterton (2006) called "tactical compromise". It is supported by a "set of power relations" (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006) through which squatters negotiate their desire for autonomy with the pragmatic reality constituted by the authorities' representatives, local organizations and a hostile social landscape.

3.3 The urban dimension of marginalization

The transition to neoliberalism triggered a colonization of urban spaces unseen before in Europe, which aggravated marginalization and precarity in urban contexts. Loïc Wacquant's (2007) concept of "advanced marginality" gives a useful framework to contextualize social centers within the frame of increased racism and exclusion of marginalized social groups from the urban space. Wacquant recognized the formation of a new category of marginalization, different from other forms of urban marginality because of its growth in the most developed economies in the Global North. Advanced marginality creates a "broader context of class decomposition" (244) characterized by the fragmentation of the marginalized groups which fails in creating a unified resistance front. It is triggered by the general social instability, life insecurity, wage instability and the increasing flexible or precarious labor. The marginalization of the poor occurs also at a policy level and it is connected with the stigmatization of spaces where the advance marginality tends to concentrate, the so called "penalized spaces" (ibid).

The concept of "revanchist city" (Smith 1996) well illustrates the Italian model of "cooperative city" (Patti and Polyák 2016) often pioneered by social center. Revanchist city indicates the reaction against the 'theft' of the city and it appears as "a desperate defense of a challenged phalanx of privileges, cloaked in the populist language of civic morality, family values and neighborhood security" (207). This theft of the city is often supported by legislative measures. In Italy, in February 2017, an administrative emergency order on urban security and public order, generally known as daspo urbano (D.L. 20 February 2017 n.14 – converted in law April 18, 2017 n.48), gave mayors direct power in taking action regarding situations that they considered would compromise public safety, urban decency, or that could downgrade the use of urban spaces. This law, implemented by the left-wing government, resulted in the criminalization of marginalized people and their removal from the public space. As Catone and Maestri (2018) argue, the definition of urban security has a broad-spectrum that makes the application of this law arbitrary. For example, the daspo urbano allows the local police to give sanctions or to remove perpetrators form the violated space, directly on the spot of the infractions. It was officially recognized as a "cleaning operation" (80) and it targets specific groups such as homeless people, street vendors or housing squatters.

Increasingly in recent years, social centers have used the temporary occupation of space to oppose the exploitation of the marginalized groups such as undocumented migrants, precarious workers, or homeless people. Sassen (2014) affirms that due to the increased state neoliberalization, the city has gathered multiple forms of national and subnational identities which are not equally integrated into legal citizenship and are often subjected to higher repression. Migrants are one of the social groups who mostly suffer from partial citizenship. The increased marginalization, partial citizenship and increasing regulations of public space – with laws such as the daspo urbano have determined an alteration in the function of the social center. Squatted spaces such as those opened by the Casa Madiba Network use their informality as an opportunity to developed projects without being limited by bureaucracy accounting for their actions. Nevertheless, social centers' long-term ability of establishing alternative forms of welfare is challenged by their own instability.

In the following section, I will explain the strategy used by the activists from the Casa Madiba Network in coping with such difficulties and its effects on their long-term work.

4. The Case of The Casa Madiba Network: Community as a Political Strategy

4.1. Situating the Casa Madiba Network in its local context

The Casa Madiba Network is located in Rimini, a provincial town of about 340,000 inhabitants on the Adriatic coast, with an economy based mostly on seasonal seaside tourism (Battilani and Fauri, 2009). Since 1995, it has been governed by center-left coalitions and since 2011 has had a stable mayor, Andrea Gnassi, a representative of the Democratic Party. Rimini is part of the region of Emilia Romagna, one of the most advanced economies in Italy. Emilia Romagna's economic development was led by small-scale businesses, often organized under the form of cooperatives. After the financial crisis of 2008, social cooperatives inspired by civil society have stepped up to provide for those left behind by the welfare system (Zamagni and Zamagni, 2010), nonetheless poverty and social marginalization have continued to grow. A 2018 Caritas report shows that in Emilia-Romagna the relative poverty rate has doubled from 2.2% in 2009 to 4.5% in 2016, the rate of the population in absolute poverty increased from 3.3% to 7.6% between 2005 and 2015. Caritas found 4000 homeless people; for most of them homelessness was caused by long-term unemployment and by the absence of informal networks of care.

Homeless stigmatization has also increased due to the daspo urban, which allows the police to immediately fine and remove offenders from the area for 48 hours, which can potentially be extended by the local police commissioner. Marginalization was favored by the growing presence of openly far right groups. For example, militants of Forza Nuova, neo-fascist party, have intimidated Casa Gallo's residents by taking videos of the shelter and threatening the inhabitants with dogs. They justified their actions at Casa Gallo as a "security check", but, in the view of the activists, these security checks sadly resembled fascist patrols. Casa Gallo is situated on a former industrial site, now vacant, which mirrors one of the "penalized spaces" Wacquant talks about: this indeterminate space became a temporary bivouac for various marginalized groups, and consequentially, it was stigmatized. The Casa Madiba Network cleaned and refurbished their area and become its informal guardians, in the absence of a public intervention of refurbishment.

High social stigmatization and the absence of a cohesive activists' network (that is instead scattered throughout the region) along with the lack of an involved student body has made Rimini unfavorable for social centers. Squatting in fact appears to be much more complicated in the interurban area of Emilia Romagna than in the bigger cities. Squatters in smaller cities are evicted quickly and highly criminalized, and they are often denigrated in the local press (Filhol 2018). It is hard for them to reach the wider public and support themselves through practices of self-management. For these reasons, the Casa Madiba Network worked to secure a set of alliances that would protect the group and improve its image in the public press. Their squat institutionalization appeared as a necessary step to secure a space that would not be subject to repression.

4.2. The path of a squat's institutionalization

Casa Madiba is a social center squatted in 2013 and institutionalized two years later. The Casa Madiba Network is composed by several subgroups who pursue alternative forms of welfare and political

mobilization. Over the past few years, this network developed several intersectional activities to address individuals' practical needs as much as the human need for socialization and companionship, while pursuing projects of political mobilization and activities of self-financing for the social center. Overcoming the high level of authority repression was a long process for the Casa Madiba Network activists. In fact, its history is rooted in a longer activist presence in Rimini. This militant collective, originally known as Lab Paz Project, was formed during the Genoa 2001 Social Forum and it was inspired by the No Global and Ya Basta movements. Between 2004 and 2008, they were based in the squatted social center Lab Paz, a former school in Rimini's countryside. After the eviction from Lab Paz, the collective continued its work using the facilities of the Casa Della Pace (House For Peace) – a space which hosts and coordinates associations committed to issues of peace, international cooperation, solidarity and human rights. They kept squatting other buildings in Rimini, but were evicted quickly.

In 2013, the collective collaborated with the migrants who were spontaneously mobilizing to accelerate their documents' application process that were taking longer than legally scheduled. At the same time, the "North Africa Emergency Plan" was about to terminate and migrants were about to lose the opportunity to be hosted in the centers provided by the Central Service of the Asylum Seekers Protection (SPRAR) infrastructure. In December 2013, the activists, together and some of the migrants in need of housing, squatted the old firehouse in via Dario Campana, opening Casa Madiba. The aim of the squat was twofold: to provide temporary accommodation for three homeless of migrant origins and to find a working space for the activists.

In May 2015, the activists squatted a second house named Villa Florentina ed Eva to host more homeless people. This was a vacant private building and the activists were accusing the owners of real estate speculation and the consequent rent price increase in the city. Shortly after, both Casa Madiba and Villa Florentina ed Eva were evicted. The response to the evictions was mobilization. During one demonstration, the activists squatted another vacant house in Rimini, which they called Villino Ricci. This was a building inherited by the municipality in 2006 from a poet, Teresa Ricci, who wished her house be used for social and cultural projects. For six months, Villino Ricci hosted about 17 homeless. In Villino Ricci, the activists developed a series of social care project, such as a clothing collection, social lunches, and Italian language classes. This occupation gained the support of citizens not affiliated with the movement, who contributed food and clothes for Villino Ricci's occupants and for all those in need in Rimini. Among the activists, there is the general belief that a collaboration with the established local organization was fundamental in reaching a wider goal and that there was a need to adapt to the social-geographical local landscape in order to carry on the project. Despite having a strong local support, both Casa Madiba and Villino Ricci were evicted in November 2015. In December 2015, the municipality launched a public tender to assign the former firehouse for community use. The activists participated and won, reopening Casa Madiba on December 24th, 2015. Because of the upcoming cold season, the administration opened a call for a temporary homeless shelter to host people in need in the city. The activists from Casa Madiba developed a successful project and gained temporary access to a close by warehouse, that they transformed into a shelter for homeless people, named after the anarchist priest don Andrea Gallo, Casa (don) Gallo.

To open Casa Gallo, the municipality of Rimini promised 15,000 euros and the use of the warehouse for 6 months (December 2015 - April 2016). Officially, the project was represented by two associations: Onlus Rumori Sinistri (Sinister Noises), focused on citizenship issues (migration, documents), labor exploitation, the NGO No Borders, and housing issues. The activists kept Casa Gallo open also after its official closure, occupying the place illegally and under the threat of eviction. The municipality requested the payment of the utilities from April 2016 and never granted the 15,000 euros promised. Casa Gallo was self-managed and self-financed for the following two years. Finally, in spring 2018, the municipality committed to fund the

renovation of the building and to re-assign the space on a permanent basis through a public tender which was again won by the two associations representing the group. The building renovations were done following the design project done by the Casa Gallo's residents and it was overseen by the activists. The local government's progressive change of attitude towards the Casa Madiba collective suggests an endorsement of the activists' work and an acknowledgement of both the presence of a vacant space in Via de Warthema in Rimini and of the increased homelessness. Because of the informality of the services provided, Casa Madiba and Casa Gallo remained for long time outside the capitalist economy but at the same time they unwillingly contributed to the accumulation of capital, by solving a problem that the state was not addressing.

Opening Casa Gallo and the return to Casa Madiba is remembered with great emotion by the squatters. Winning a public grant and legally entering the formerly squatted space is proudly seen as an important milestone in the collective's history, a form of legitimization of their presence on the territory, and a semi-official entitling as actors in the decision upon the specific territory. Far from considering it a form of selling out, the activists in Casa Madiba understood their use of a public tender in terms of what Hodkinson and Chatterton (2006) called "tactical compromise" that allow them to ensure a degree of stability and to continue providing services for the community.Casa Madiba and Casa Gallo's institutionalization followed a common trend of social centers' authority negotiation process in Europe, but, in order to survive, squatters located in smaller towns, such as Rimini, strategically adapted to local social-geography and incorporated volunteerism work in their day by day political practice. Having found stability with the institutionalized, the Casa Madiba collective build a "set of power relations" (Pickerill and Chatterton 2006) through which to negotiate their desire for autonomy with the pragmatic reality constituted by the authorities representatives, local organizations and a hostile social landscape. Far from considering it a form of selling out, the activists in Casa Madiba understood their use of a public tender in terms of what Hodkinson and Chatterton (2006) called "tactical compromise" that allow them to ensure a degree of stability and to continue providing services for the community.

Casa Gallo is probably the most ambitious project developed by the activists. The group proposed to create a homeless shelter that, besides giving a bed for the night, would have helped people reintegrating in society: it would be open day and night, without limits of nights spent in the shelter. It would have medical and legal support. It would provide activities to develop the residents' skills, helping them return to being active members of the community, eventually gaining access the job market and finding proper housing. Many informal alliances were established to support this long-term goal and to meet the every-day needs of Casa Gallo's residents. For example, a doctor and a nurse would voluntarily visit Casa Gallo. A bakery and a vegetable shop regularly donate food to the shelter. Casa Gallo was also registered in more formal donation systems such as The Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived (FEAD) that provides material assistance to the most deprived, and the Fondazione Banco Alimentare, an organization that collects food from various sources and redistributes it to those in need, and which is connected to Catholic organizations such as Communion and Liberation. The formal and informal set of alliances have given access to a wider source of resources that became accessible not only to the residents of Casa Gallo but to all the people in need living in the area. Their "flexible institutionalization" (Pruijt 2003) enabled the activists to combine non-disruptive and disruptive forms of actions and did not entail a loss of identity for squatters. In the words of one of them:

> Casa Madiba succeeds in seeing a goal instead of an ideal…. maybe the ideal could have been good, but in fact, we need to understand how to put it in practice, and for this, we need to know where we are and what we have around us. Our strength is exactly to avoid maintaining an ideal purism and to take decisions that can move us forward (Barbara, January 17th, 2018, informal conversation).

The pursuance of radical politics remains central to the collective. The Casa Madiba network is part of the national network of social movements in Italy and has local units of mobilization for various issues, such as feminist politics, support of Kurdish fighters, environmental issues, school politics, labor and migration issues. The network has developed its strategies by mixing the ideological framework of the Disobbedienti and the new claim for common goods. It is collocated at the intersection of the tradition of social centers of Northern Italy and of the new trend of bottom up urban planning. Through the pursuit of bottom-up welfare, the activists want to activate a process of empowerment of people involved that can lead them to "autonomy" and "self-determination", and secondly to put into practice a vision of social reality that escapes narratives of oppression and capitalist exploitation.

4.3 Urban communing to secure long-term social change

Squatting and the temporal use of space gave the activists the opportunity to develop and implement a different vision of urban space. Living in Casa Gallo is intended as a "itinerary of liberation" that aims for people's emancipation from a subjugation position given by poverty and homelessness. The goal behind Casa Gallo is to empower citizens to seek change for themselves and for the wider community. This looks like an attempt at the creation and politicization of a class consciousness that resembles the operaisti's view on the figure of the "worker" in the '50s and '60s (Wright 2002), where the homeless or the migrants appear to be the new revolutionary subjects. Although the workerist model presupposed "forms and languages of conflict very distant from migrants' everyday experiences" (Antonelli and Perrotta 2016, 150), this pursuance of emancipation is in line with the ideological framework in which the activists operate. As mentioned in section 3.1 of this paper, the Disobbedienti movement (which inspired the Casa Madiba Network) embraced the concept of "exodus", which indicates a model of revolutionary process that aims to establish a counter state power through acts of civil disobedience (Hardt and Virno 2006). The term "exodus" follows a religious metaphor to summarize the process of liberation and the pursuit of the 'promised land'" (Becucci 2003). In the Disobbedienti view, there is no idea of the 'workers' centrality', but they consider society's transformation as an everyday problem for everybody. Therefore, the squatted place cannot be seen as a "promised land", a goal to reach, but is constructed every day by putting together resources, time, knowledge, and skills (Montagna 2006). It is under these lenses that we can better grasp the values of pursuing the urban commons and enabling processes of communing .

At the opening of Casa Gallo, the activists started a participatory urban renewal project called Madi Marecchia (Social workshop of civic-mindedness, solidarity and urban renewal) to improve Casa Gallo and its surroundings. This project involved the participation of an architect, an urban planner, the residents of Casa Gallo, activists and people from the neighborhoods, using the charette method[1] of planning to trigger a collaborative planning process. The first step was to make Casa Gallo resemble a home despite its temporality, its limited space and the lack of a budget. They created a division between day and night-time areas, used recycled wardrobes between the beds to create a sense of intimacy for each resident, allocated dedicated areas to sports and prayer, and created a temporary kitchen. According to the activists, Casa Gallo was opened with the intention of overcoming dependency culture and to foster individuals on their path towards "self-determination". As Felicia, leading activist of the group, told me:

[1]The charette procedure is a collaborative session of brainstorming ideas used in urban planning to consult with large groups and involved stakeholders, developers, and residents.

> We immediately said that we don't want charity [in Casa Gallo] but rather the empowerment of people, of the city, of the poor. It is not that if someone is poor, they must have charity, a piece of bread and a bed to sleep in. Poor people are also skillful. That must be reactivated, for example, by making them aware of their condition. Very often, the condition is also generated by this model of liberal capitalist development, which tramples people's rights (April 26th, 2017 interview).

An example of the strategy of empowerment was the construction of a clay oven. Residents in Casa Gallo were trained to bake pizza so that they could work in the Casa Madiba restaurant, open every Wednesday summer night and for special events. Some of the trainees have already used the new acquired skills to find jobs during the tourist season. Here the oven is not only a tool but also a symbol of socialization and dialogue as it recalls the most traditional way of community gathering. Following this symbolism, the oven is placed on the edges of a newly opened passage, and the weekly pizzeria project is named after the passage, Pizzeria Il Varco. It also symbolizes independence from having to pay to acquire tools and means for production.

Finally, Casa Gallo's contribution to overcoming urban marginalization and partial citizenship was also legal. Many of the homeless people are not officially residents of the city and therefore cannot access public services such as education, healthcare or unemployment support. People declared their domicile status in Casa Gallo and requested a certificate of residency. The residence certificate was not always granted; the inspectors justify this rejection on the temporal nature of the Casa Gallo project. These bureaucratic snags highlight the continuous tension between the radical temporary users and the state and the possibility of using a commons project to push the barriers of law.

The second step in the Madi Marecchia project was to address the needs of the local neighbors. The warehouse on via De Warthema hosting Casa Gallo is a state-owned property that also hosts a diurnal senior center and an Orthodox congregation. In its proximity, there are several disused buildings, informal settlements, and a city park. Part of the Madi Marecchia project involved cleaning the vacant areas all around and opening a walking passage to connect Casa Madiba to Casa Gallo (il Varco). For years, this passage was obstructed by storage materials. By cleaning and lighting the passage, it has become usable for those visiting the senior center or those who wish to reach the park, but it also created an pathway in the neighborhood that connects various social-related projects. Casa Gallo and Casa Madiba are part of this itinerary which gives them more visibility and can, over time, facilitate the interaction between the groups who inhabit this area. Some of the trainees have already used the new acquired skills to find jobs during the tourist season. Here the oven is not only a tool but also a symbol of socialization and dialogue as it recalls the most traditional way of community gathering. newly opened passage, and the weekly pizzeria project is named after the passage, Pizzeria Il Varco. It also symbolizes independence from having to pay to acquire tools and means for production.

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The Madi Marecchia project did not simply improve Casa Gallo and its surroundings, but it created an infrastructure through which independent groups of individuals assume the right and the responsibility of planning a space. This project opened a process of communing that connected a variety of individuals who were interested in the area, and who directly benefit from the project's outcomes. In this sense, activists and citizens become protagonists of urban planning and contributed to the development of a "just city" (Fainstein

2010). They followed a model of organization that has been developed among the lines of the urban social movements and based on autonomist or anarchist ideological frameworks. The informality of spaces offers an opportunity to envision space, it can transform the commoners into "pioneers of the city restructuring" (Colomb 2012), whose work can be used by local authorities or by private investors to push the frontiers of urban development.To better understand this collective's process of communing, it is important to look at their choices of naming and definitions. Casa Madiba was labeled by the activists as a "social space" (spazio sociale) and not a "social center" (centro sociale). They did not reject the label of "social center" and would use it internally, in other activists' circles or when talking to me, but they would not use it publicly. This is because this label has been highly stigmatized in the local press and connected to drug abuse and micro-criminality. By using a different label, the activists distance themselves from the stigma and are able to reach out and to find the support of the city's more moderate solidarity groups, including some Catholic organizations involved in social projects. Moreover, this social project is defined as a "network" of different projects that aim to create a grassroots solution "to every type of problem". According to one of the leading activists the network is not to be attributed only to these active in the political collective, but rather "militancy belongs to everybody" who wish to contribute to change society through practices of solidarity. In this sense, Casa Madiba's activists are proud of their holistic approach to the individual needs. The activists have established a collaborative relationship with organizations that do not necessarily share the same political ethos but who are involved in providing services to the marginalized individuals.

5. Concluding Remarks

In this paper, I reflected on the role of squatting in the establishment of urban commons. The Casa Madiba Network offers a non-metropolitan perspective on squatting and on the creation of alternative forms of welfare which are community-led and inclusive. With a case study coming from a non-metropolitan center, which faces the difficulties of a fragmented territory and the weakness of the local social movement, this paper contributes with heterogeneity in understanding how social movements function and challenges the binary assumptions of small/big city in its notion of where politics happens. The provincial area of Emilia Romagna offers a unique perspective of how bottom-up politics is pursued since its population has historically been closed to partisan struggles and left-ideological motifs. Although being a left-wing government, the local municipality of Rimini was very repressive towards the squatters and only agreed to negotiate with them when their efforts were clearly needed to deal with the homeless population. Future research should deepen the analysis of the relationship between local governments and squatters in smaller towns, giving special attention to how temporary use of space projects are put into practice, and on how to they fit into the local panorama of businesses and cooperative organizations.

Central to this article was unveiling some of the processes necessary for the creation of urban commons in the context of the Italian social centers' movement. The paper takes into account some issues that make squatters hesitant when engaging with the state and local stakeholders. The tendency among municipalities to activate forms of temporary use of space (to account for the lack of long-term welfare strategies) gave the activists of the Casa Madiba Network the possibility to reinforce their position on the territory of Rimini and to develop a set of alliances that would become fundamental in maintaining and improving Casa Gallo. Literature suggests that projects based on the temporary use of space risk being taken advantage of, as they increase the market value of their areas of intervention, especially when they engage in community led renovation projects which improve the area's reputation (Colomb 2012, Bragaglia and Caruso 2020). By using space temporarily, either through squatting or through public tenders, the Casa Madiba Network has

managed to navigate along the limits of the state's rules and needs to secure a permanent space where bottom-up welfare is envisioned and implemented through self-management. The flexible institutionalization of Casa Madiba interrupted the radical repertoire of action of the activists, who have been illegally appropriating spaces in Rimini for years and who have been highly repressed and stigmatized. Institutionalization functioned as a strategy for the stabilization of the social center and allowed it to implement alternative forms of welfare and community-led urban renewal. Many of the actors involved in the process of communing gained access to resources that enable them to improve their living status and to regain citizenship, becoming members of a community and free themselves form a stigma suffered.

In this article, I engaged with a limited part of my research material focusing specifically on the squat's institutionalization and on the process of activating alternative forms of welfare by establishing urban commons. I left aside the analysis of the social center's decision-making process, of self-management and a reflection on the concept of autonomy which are central to the understanding of social centers as political projects. Future research should focus on these aspects central to the ethos of activists and determinant in the urban commons' formation. It is important to notice that the "meanwhile" (Andres 2012) strategy used by local government can also be harmful for the community-led initiatives whose efforts risk to be co-opted by the local official governmental bodies. Theory suggests that processes of communing and the pragmatic need of being locally grounded often challenges the activists' values and pushes them to reconsider the meaning of autonomy and self-management. Far from being a fixed formula, the desire of autonomy confronts the reality of the everyday life practice that is messy, imperfect and full of overlapping, multi-scalar identities and worldviews. "Anti-capitalism" cannot ever equal to "non-capitalism", but resistance groups must develop strategies of subversion to capitalism that are inherent to the environment in which their communities operate. Future empirical research should continue the analysis of the effects of projects implementing bottom-up welfare practices starting from squatting and focus on how self-management and self-financing are affected by the interaction with local stakeholders. Although being a left-wing government, the local municipality of Rimini was very repressive towards the squatters and only agreed to negotiate with them when their efforts were clearly needed to deal with the homeless population.

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